/30 cont./

765 526 After the meal, the dzhiriti takes place, reminiscent of the tournaments of the Middle Ages. Now the fair sex occupies the passageway near the house. Young men on horseback assemble in front of the beauties and vie with each other in attempts to display their wit, inventiveness, and knowledge in speeches, and their bravery in the dzhigitovka /trick-riding/ which will follow.

The main dzhigitovka, tarchei /see foreign text/, consists of the following. One of the competing riders accepts from the host of the feast /31/ or from one of the beauties some strips of chintz, a small sewn boot, a rosary of chestnuts, or something else, and, holding this tarchei in his hand, he gallops ahead with it while the other lads pursue him and try to catch him and take away the tarchei. If someone is successful in this, the tarchei passes into the hands of the one who has taken it away from the first rider; then that one races off, and the others again chase after him. The one who escapes capture and manages to bring the tarchei back to the place where the competition started is the winner. The horsemen's competition does not end with this, however; they continue to prance around on horseback, pick up money from the ground at full gallop, etc.

765 541 Sometimes there are also horse-races at the mourning banquet. Children of eight to nine years of age are horsemen. A goal is pointed out to the competitors, and the first one to reach it wins something. In this case, the hosts present the winners with the horse of the deceased, with some animal, or with a khak (arshin or span) of chintz.

VI.

Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz

• 771 "Up to the year 1867," wrote Mr. A. in his excellent article on the Abkhaz, "the religious situation among the Abkhaz was absurd in the extreme. One found there the rites of all religious doctrines, from fetishism to Christianity. These people had no precise conception of any religion, but adopted from all of them

/31 cont./

771 whatever stood out most sharply and acted most strongly upon their almost childish imagination" (1). Madame Giorgidze says: "At

1. See Sborn. sved. o kavk. gorts., No. V.

present the majority of the Abkhaz profess the Christian religion, the minority Mohammedan. In spite of this, the Abkhaz is little informed in either of the two religions and is really a heathen rather than Christian or Moslem" (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888.

1.

775 766 The Souls of the Dead -- Their Wanderings on Earth

The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, /32/ or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried. It is not enough, therefore, to take a drowned body out of the river to bury it, for the soul of the deceased must also be evoked from the water and brought into the grave in which the body of the drowned man is buried. This is the ceremony of the evocation and capture of a drowned person's soul. Men and women gather on both sides of the river from which the corpse of the drowned man has been recovered. Across the river, from one bank to the other, a silk thread is stretched, from which a leather knapsack is hung, its lower end almost touching the water. The men and women then begin to the sound of the balalaika. The Abkhaz is convinced that the soul of the dead leaves the water and enters the knapsack when it hears the sounds of the balalaika and the singing. When the Abkhaz think that the soul has entered the bag, one of the men jumps into the water and ties it up. They then carry the

[534] [533]

[766 cont.] Then one tries to console the dead (angip'sngis) with prayer and sacrifices of meat and sour milk, which are laid on a cloth under a protective roof near some clothing and, in the case of female souls, trinkets, and begs for the recovery of the stricken person, who stands nearby and whose back is stroked for "deliverance" (azati).

When someone has drowned and his body has been buried, his soul is supposed to have remained in the water and must be fetched out. For this purpose they hang a leather shoulder-sack on a silk string over the stream in question, and men and women stand on the back singing and playing the harp to entice the soul into the sack. As soon as the soul has slipped in, a man jumps into the water and ties the sack shut, he then takes it to the grave and allows the soul to enter into its body through a hole.

[767] Religious beliefs and customs. Christianity is supposed to have been brought to Abkhazia, according to the Georgian chronicle of Vakhtang V, about 40 A.D., but apparently did not find favorable soil, since there are no reports of successful propagation until the time of the Byzantine occupation of the coastal cities. Emperor Justinian had a large church erected at Bitshvinta (pitzunda) where the Abkhaz Catholics and the Georgian governor then had their residence. At the end of the seventeenth century most of the Abkhaz were induced by the Tatars to take up Islam, and only the Samurakhan remained faithful to Christianity, but the many ruins of churches and monasteries are regarded by them as holy places to which they make pilgrimages and on which they take oaths. Also several customs may have a Christian origin: use of wax tapers and incense, colored Easter-eggs, respect for the sign of the cross, fasting, eating of pork, and the like. The Cherkess, in whose lands few remains of churches are to be found, gave up Christianity for Islam later than the Abkhaz; the Kabardin were converted to it toward the middle of the eighteenth century, and the others, under Turkish influence, toward the end of the eighteenth century. Both religions, however, have exerted as little influence as among the mountain Georgians, for the old indigenous beliefs and customs have never been given up.

The gods of the Abkhaz are very similar to those of the Osset (see pp. 86 f.). A supreme god (Antsar mz) is ruler over

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
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already collected for the writing of a full-size monograph dealing with the religious beliefs and customs of the K'art's, Ibers, and Svans. However, after some reflection I decided that the time was not ripe for such a task as some necessary data were lacking and I therefore decided to publish only the notes. Here and there, however, I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon certain considerations and inquiries belonging to the larger plane, and these have overflowed in the form of footnotes.

The founders of Christianity, realizing that it was not so easy after all to eradicate from the consciousness of the majority of the population religious beliefs and rites observed for thousands of years, endeavoured to transform them, by wrapping them up in their own clothing and so adapting them to the Christian feasts and saints; thus they established their own annual festivals. Wherever possible I have followed in my account the established order of church festivals.

I should further point out that all the material herein described was collected in one village only, namely, Adzvibzha, in southern Abkhasia (the province of Abzhua), which, according both to Georgian and foreign (for instance, of the missionary A. Lamberti) historical sources constituted until the second half of the seventeenth century, part of Megrelia. This accounts for the fact that the Megrelian influence is so strongly noticeable. I think it is quite possible that some of the beliefs herein described may be capable of a different interpretation in Northern Abkhasia.

I begin my notes with Àyt'ar. In the first place, however, it will be expedient to explain my views on the chief deity *antswd*,* God.

Antswd is a compound word, consisting of *an*, "mother," and *tswa* (*ratswd*)—"many," which together denote "many mothers" or simply "mothers"; the word is thus in the plural form.[1] "In a formal or grammatical sense," says Dcharaia, "it is not an error; only the word 'mother' forms in the plural *antswa* and 'God'—*antswd*, i.e. the difference is in the accent. But in colloquial speech both words,

* The underlined *tsw* is a trigraph representing a sound uttered with one articulative effort or breath impulse, of which the digraph "*ts*" represents the front lingual affricate equivalent to German "*z*" (*Zeit*, time), and the labial semi-vowel "*w*", the labialization of the preceding "*ts*". "*Tsw*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*ts*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet* (in Russian), Leningrad, 1926, p. 31. [Translator's Note.]

[1] It would be premature at this stage to enter into the question of the identification of the conception "god", in Abkhasian, with "mother", and any attempt to give a morphological explanation of the form, which is incontestably the plural in *-tswa*, with the aid of the Abkhasian word *ratswa* would be superfluous (see N. Marr, *Definition of the Language of the Second Category of the Achaemenian Cuneiform Inscriptions* (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Petersburg, 1915, §62. See also his *On the Origin of the Name Anapa* (in Russian). It is the usual linguistic method of the Abkhasians to interpret everything, even suffixes, such as the plural termination *-tswa* in the above instance, by means of the Abkhasian speech, with the aid of the Abkhasian words that survive to this day. [Note by the Editor of the *Kristianskii Vostok*.]

oak the Megrelians built a church in its honour, in which this icon rests to this day. It has not forgotten the Svans whom it often visits." My Megrelian informant is an inhabitant of Salkhino.

9. *Àhwsa-rəmshap'*

Abkhasians call the first Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, *Àhwsa-rəmshap'*, i.e. Pascha for women. This day is set apart for public games. Early in the morning everybody assembles in the public square where they indulge in all sorts of sport, chiefly, however, horse racing and tournaments. Next day the Abkhasians go back to work, and ordinary life is resumed.

The public games (on holidays) are continued till Whit Monday.

10. *Àdsyla-nəhwa*

In connection with *Àmshap'* mention may be made of two supplications, *Àdsyla-nəhwa* (cf. III (*d*)) and "*Supplication of the Leybaa*". I have not been lucky enough to have witnessed the latter ceremony, which, by the way, belongs to a cult of the Bzib Abkhasians.[1] The worship of the tree, so picturesquely described by ancient writers, such as Strabo, Procopius of Cæsarea, is preserved in a most conspicuous form with its sacred grove, in this supplication of the Leybaa *gvari*, as is also the name of the deity, in that of *Àdsyla-nəhwa*; *Àdsyla* denotes tree, *nəhwa* (*anəhwara*), praying, supplication. The deity of the tree itself is called *Àdsyla-intswakhwə*, wherein the latter part denotes "his (of the male rational being) part of god, deity". The Abkhasians in their religion personify and "intellectualize" all manifestations of life, and they strictly distinguish the gender of each of them.

In order to protect wanton children who roam about without restraint, and love to climb trees, the Abkhasians make offerings to the "spirit of the tree", entreating the "great part of the deity of the tree" to guard their children against falling off trees and hurting themselves. The objects offered are capon and cakes. The oak (*a-j*) they consider as the sacred tree, to which they make the offering; walnut-trees (particularly the hazel-nut-tree) and yoke-elms are "pure" trees. If someone falls from the tree they must dig up some coal from under the spot where the person fell; if no coal is found, the accident is regarded as serious; and the person will not survive the fall. An offering is also made to the "spirit of the tree" in the case of certain illnesses, as directed by sorceresses, the sick person being supposed to have fallen ill through having incurred the wrath of the spirit.

[1] About this see the article by N. Pateypa, in the *Collaborator of the Transcaucasian Mission* (in Russian), 1912, pp. 107–112, 124–7.

4: Janashia I-5 (1921) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
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THE ABKHASIAN NAME OF THE SUPREME BEING

By SIMON JANASHIA

[Atranslation of the article published in Georgian in *Dzelidsdeuli*—The Year Book, of the Georgian Philological Society, Tiflis, 1923–4, vol. i–ii, pp. 69–73.]

IT was Uslar who first observed that the Abkhasian name of the Supreme Being was in the plural.[1] He even quotes an example, i.e. *anṭswə́ dəuk'wa*,* the great God, lit. (*les*) *dieux grands*, in which the appearance of the adjective in the plural definitely testifies that, in the conception of the speaker, the ancient religious ideas—according to which God was not of one, but of many parts—were still in existence. The author remarks " only heathen Abkhasians say this ", the Chirstian and Muhammadan Abkhasians conceiving God quite definitely as the One, absolute Being.

Such an assertion was, perhaps, an excusable mistake on the part of the distinguished linguist, who was an orthodox Christian. It is impossible to divide the Abkhasians into such groups on the basis of their religious beliefs, despite the fact that formally they belong either to the Christian Church or to Islam. The example quoted by Uslar is probably one of those fortuitous discoveries whereby there suddenly emerges from the routine of ordinary usage a product of the national-spiritual creativeness belonging to the depths of the remote past.

Later, the same opinion (about the plural form) was put forward by Dcharaia [2] and Janashia.[3] The latter, however, thought that the word in question may have originated from the same *an*-root which in Abkhasian denotes the *mother*-notion.

Professor Marr shares only the first part of this view: he writes,[4] " . . . of great interest is the word *an*, god, which, in Abkhasian, appears usually as the plurale tantum *anṭswə́*, God, lit. ' gods '."

In the summer of 1921, while in Abkhasia, in the village Adzvibzha (in Abzhua, the Kodor district), where I was sent by the Tiflis State University on a philological research study, I was able to collect certain data which threw more light on the question, as will be seen.

In the course of my research work, I was able to establish the validity of the formation of the word in question by the discovery

* For the pronunciation of *ṭsw* and *k'w*, see p. 118, n. *, and p. 131, n. *. (Translator's note.)

[1] Uslar, P. K., *The Abkhasian Language* (in Russian). Tiflis, 1887, p. 78.

[2] Dcharaia, P., *On the Relation of the Abkhasian Language to the Japhetic Languages*, in *Materials for Japhetic Linguistics* (in Russian), St. Petersburg, 1912, vol. iv, pp. 31–3.

[3] Janashia, N., *The Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians*, in *The Christian East* (in Russian), St. Pb., 1913, vol. iv, issue i, pp. 74–5. [See the English translation in this number, pp. 118–9. ED.]

[4] Marr, N., *From a Linguistic Journey to Abkhasia* in *Izvestiya* (Bulletin) of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (in Russian), St. Pb., 1913, vol. vii, No. 6, p. 518.